

Physical Inactivity Costs Billions in Washington State

Executive Summary

A lack of physical activity contributes to most of the leading causes of disease and early death, including cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, osteoporosis, mental health due to depression and anxiety, breast and colon cancer.¹ This study, conducted by Health Management Associates, was commissioned by Washington State Department of Health and Washington Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity. It estimates the price of physical in-activity in our state at more than \$5 billion in 2002.



Amazingly, 44.5 percent of adults in Washington State are classified as physically inactive, according to the 2001 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.²

The Department of Health identifies physical inactivity as not engaging in any regular pattern of physical activity beyond daily functioning and not achieving the recommended



level of physical activity per week. The physical activity recommendation for adults is 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day, at least 10 minutes at a time, on 5 or more days per week.

In 2004 the Washington State Department of Health and the Washington Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity contracted with Health Management Associates to estimate the economic costs of physical inactivity. The study looked at direct and indirect costs of the health conditions associated with physical inactivity, including mental health.

It analyzed data from three main sources:

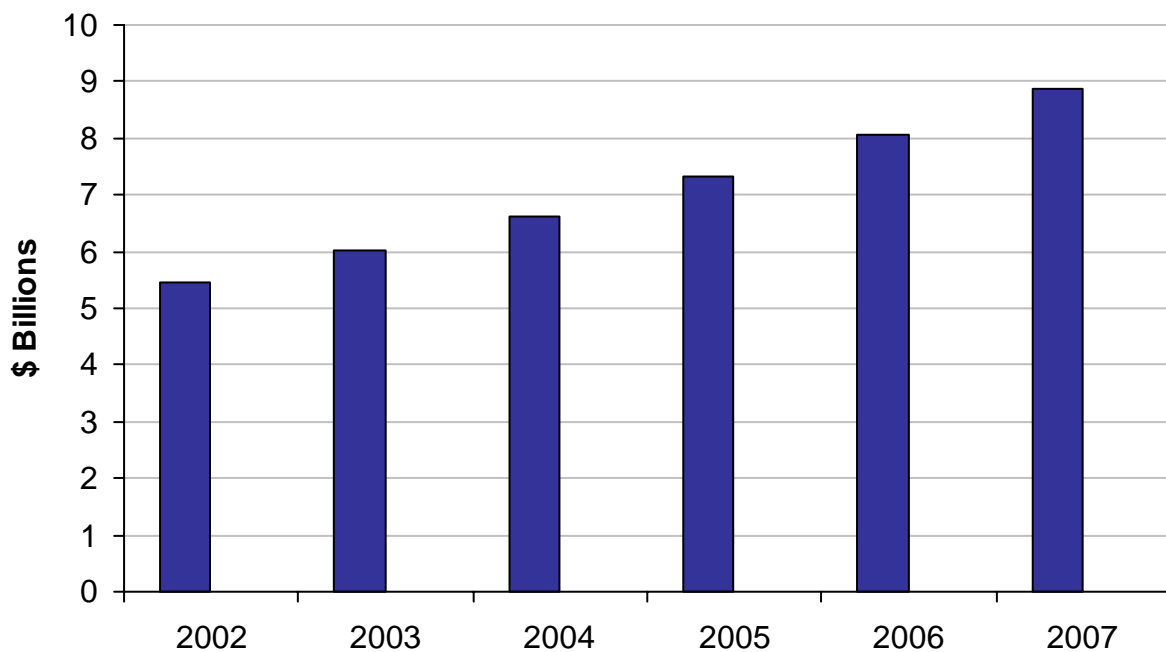
- ❖ Inpatient and outpatient medical claims and Medicaid inpatient charge data
- ❖ Workers' compensation data
- ❖ Workers productivity data from the state government and scientific literature.

Category	Direct cost	Indirect cost
Medical care	\$197.8 million	\$593.3 million
Worker's compensation	\$9.2 million	\$36.8 million
Lost productivity	\$4.6 billion	

Just how much does this cost?

The study estimates the direct medical costs of physical inactivity at \$118 million for cardiovascular diseases, \$44.5 million for mental health due to depression and anxiety, \$17.3 million for muscle and bone injuries, \$9 million for diabetes and other metabolic disorders, \$7.4 million for cancer, and \$1.3 million for carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive use injuries. Physical inactivity contributes to some of the most costly and preventable work-related injuries. The lost productivity cost estimate totaled \$4.6 billion, representing absenteeism, short-term disability and “presenteeism,” the productivity loss that occurs when workers are on the job but not functioning fully due to illness or injury.³ The cost of physical inactivity will increase to nearly \$9 billion by 2007, according to the study, based on current trends in medical and labor costs, inflation, and the aging of Washington’s population (see table below)

Real (2002) and Projected Costs of Physical Inactivity in the State of Washington



Overall, this report illustrates that physical inactivity has a profound impact on the present and future health, productivity, economic status, and longevity of Washington residents.

What are we doing about it?

There are several efforts underway to increase physical activity in Washington. Two of the most extensive are the implementation of the Washington State Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan and a new statewide effort that focuses on supporting local and state leaders' efforts to develop policies and leadership activities that foster healthier communities. This program is called the Washington State Active Living Leadership Network. The plan, created by the Washington State Department of Health and its partners, is a guideline for action, which targets changes in the environment and policies to make the healthy choice, the easy choice. It includes recommendations to support physical education in schools, state and local recreational facilities, worksite policies, land-use planning, non-motorized transportation, and safe routes to school.⁴ Making individual choices about being physically active is important; it is equally important that the environment we live in supports us in making healthy choices.



The Washington State Active Living Leadership Network was recently formed by the Washington Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity during a public policy workshop hosted by REI. The workshop focus was on physical activity policy. As a result of this meeting and other discussions, the group has recommended support for these priorities: 1) transportation facilities and services oriented for bicycles and pedestrians, 2) land use planning and development that supports active living, and 3) communication efforts that promote active living.

We have engineered physical activity out of our lives and now we need to re-engineer it back in. The Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health, stated and has estimated that only smoking is a greater cause of premature death than physical inactivity.⁵ It took 30 years for the first Surgeon General's Report on smoking to have a real true effect on smoking and now we have to do the same with physical activity.

The Washington State Department of Health, the Washington Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, and their partners are working together to make it easier for everyone to be physically active. We will need everyone's help to do it. Be more active and support changes in your community that make it easier for everybody to be physically active.

References

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